

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06
COME-00 EB-08 LAB-04 SIL-01 /074 W
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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, PGOV, UK
SUBJECT: ILFORD NORTH BY-ELECTION SET

SUMMARY - LABOR WILL DEFEND A MARGINAL OUTER LONDON SEAT
ILFORD NORTH, IN A MARCH 2 BY-ELECTION. THIS CONTEST
WILL GIVE THE TWO MAJOR PARTIES, THE LIBERALS AND THE
NATIONAL FRONT AN OPPORTUNITY TO TEST THE ELECTORAL
TEMPERATURE AND SHOULD PROVIDE INSIGHTS INTO OTHER
FACTORS WHICH WILL BEAR ON THE OUTCOME OF A GENERAL
ELECTION. AT THIS POINT THE CONSERVATIVES ARE FAVORED
TO RECAPTURE THE SEAT THEY LOST IN OCTOBER 1974. END
SUMMARY.

1. THE DEATH OF LABOR MP MILLIE MILLER LAST YEAR
VACATED THE MARGINAL LONDON SUBURBAN SEAT OF ILFORD NORTH
WHICH LABOR WON IN OCTOBER 1974 WITH A 778 VOTE MAJORITY
OUSTING THE INCUMBENT TORY MP WHO HAD RETAINED HIS SEAT
BY AN EVEN NARROWER MARGIN OF 285 IN FEBRUARY 1974.
THE LIBERALS, WHO ARE EXPECTED TO CONTEST THE BY-
ELECTION, PRESENTED THE ONLY OTHER CANDIDATE IN THE 1974
ELECTIONS, WINNING 23.4 PERCENT OF THE VOTE IN FEBRUARY
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AND 16.6 PERCENT IN OCTOBER. THE NEO-FASCIST NATIONAL
FRONT IS ALSO REPORTED TO BE PLANNING TO ENTER THE RACE
AND, BASED ON RECENT BY-ELECTION EXPERIENCE, ONE OR MORE
TROTSKYITE AND INDEPENDENT CANDIDATES CAN BE EXPECTED TO
SWELL THE FIELD. THE BY-ELECTION HAS BEEN SET FOR
MARCH 2.

2. WHILE INDIVIDUAL BY-ELECTION RESULTS ARE OF LITTLE
VALUE IN PREDICTING THE OUTCOME OF A GENERAL ELECTION,
THE ILFORD NORTH BY-ELECTION PROMISES TO BE PARTICULARLY
INTERESTING ON SEVERAL COUNTS.

-- IT INVOLVES AN ESPECIALLY FINELY BALANCED
CONSTITUENCY (ILFORD NORTH IS LONDON'S MOST MARGINAL
SEAT AND IS THE 15TH MOST VULNERABLE LABOR MARGINAL IN
THE COUNTRY);

-- ITS OCCURRENCE IN WHAT IS GENERALLY ASSUMED TO
BE AN ELECTION YEAR AND ITS LOCATION IN THE LONDON AREA
WILL ENSURE THAT THE CANDIDATES RECEIVE UNUSUALLY HEAVY
MEDIA COVERAGE;

-- IT WILL PROVIDE A BENCHMARK AGAINST WHICH RECENT
OPINION POLL DATA CAN BE TESTED (THE VALIDITY OF THE
BENCHMARK, HOWEVER, WILL DEPEND ON THE EXTENT OF THE
VOTER TURN-OUT -- THE HIGHER THE TURN-OUT, THE MORE
MEANINGFUL THE RESULT IN GENERAL ELECTION TERMS);

-- IT WILL GIVE LIBERAL LEADER STEEL A CHANCE TO
TEST HIS POLITICAL STRATEGY IN THE LONDON AREA WHICH,
AT LEAST IN THEORY, IS THE MOST POLITICALLY SOPHISTICATE
PART OF THE UK; AND

-- IT WILL TEST THE HYPOTHESIS THAT THE CONSERVATIV
PARTY IS MOST LIKELY TO BENEFIT FROM A FALL-OFF IN THE
LIBERAL VOTE AND THE ENTRY OF A NATIONAL FRONT CANDIDATE
THE LATTER POINT IS PARTICULARLY INTERESTING BECAUS

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OF ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR A GENERAL ELECTION. CONVENTIONA WISDOM HOLDS THAT LIBERAL VOTERS DESERTING THEIR PARTY ARE INCLINED TO FAVOR THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY BY ABOUT 2 TO 1. THE 1974 DATA FOR ILFORD NORTH REVEALS A 6.8 PERCENT DECLINE IN THE LIBERAL SHARE OF THE VOTE BETWEEN FEBRUARY AND OCTOBER, AND INDICATES THAT LABOR WAS THE PRINCIPAL BENEFICIARY BY NEARLY 2 TO 1. WHETHER THIS REVERSAL OF FORM WAS DUE TO THE DEMOGRAPHIC MAKE-UP OF THE CONSTITUENCY, SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES PREVAILING AT TH OCTOBER 1974 ELECTION, OR BOTH IS NOT CLEAR. THE SECOND PART OF THIS THEORY -- THAT THE NATIONAL FRONT TENDS TO ATTRACT THOSE WHO NORMALLY SUPPORT LABOR -- WAS NOT TESTED IN THE 1974 ILFORD NORTH ELECTIONS. ALTHOUGH THERE IS NO LARGE IMMIGRANT COMMUNITY WITHIN THE ILFORD NORTH BOUNDARIES, THE PRESS REPORTS THAT THERE IS SOME CONCERN ABOUT THE IMMIGRATION/RACE ISSUE IN THE CONSTITUENCY BECAUSE OF THE GROWING IMMIGRANT COMMUNITIES IN NEIGHBORING CONSTITUENCIES.

3. THE INDIVIDUAL CANDIDATES ARE INVARIABLY IMPORTANT,
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BUT RARELY KEY, FACTORS IN BY-ELECTIONS. IN THE CASE OF ILFORD NORTH, THE CONSERVATIVES APPEAR TO HAVE AN ATTRACTIVE CANDIDATE IN VIVIAN BENDALL, A 39-YEAR-OLD CHARTERED SURVEYOR, WHO HAS BEEN CULTIVATING THE CONSTITUENCY SINCE HIS SELECTION IN 1975.

THE LABOR CANDIDATE, TESSA JOWELL, IS A CAMDEN BOROUGH COUNCILLOR AND THE ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF MENTAL HEALTH. SHORTLY AFTER HER SELECTION, HER PRIVATE LIFE BECAME AN ISSUE. IT WAS DISCLOSED THAT MRS. JOWELL, A DIVORCEE, WAS LIVING WITH ANOTHER CAMDEN COUNCILLOR WHO IS MARRIED AND HAS THREE CHILDREN. ALTHOUGH HIS DIVORCE IS PENDING, THE REVELATION IS EXPECTED TO DAMAGE HER CHANCES.

4. THE TORIES ARE REASONABLY CONFIDENT THAT THEY WILL REGAIN THE ILFORD NORTH SEAT, AND OUR LABOR CONTACTS ARE INCLINED TO AGREE, THOUGH THEY ARE NOT PREPARED TO WRITE OFF THE SEAT IN THE EVENT THERE IS A HIGH VOTER TURN-OUT (IT WAS 74.4 PERCENT IN OCTOBER 1974). AS OF NOW, WE SEE NO REASON TO DISPUTE SUCH A RARE CONSENSUS

ABOUT THE LIKELY OUTCOME OF WHAT PROMISES TO BE A CLOSE
RACE. STREATOR

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